DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 647 HE 016 454

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TITLE Academic Advising in The College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Pittsburgh. A Descriptive Report.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 8p.; Not available in paper copy due to marginal legibility.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; Case Studies; *Graduate Students; *Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Personnel Selection; Staff Orientation; *Staff Role; *Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS *University of Pittsburgh PA

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate academic advising at University of Pittsburgh's College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) occurs at two levels: freshmen-sophomore and junior-senior. The advising center assigns freshmen and sophomores advisors who are graduate students. In addition to discussing courses and plans, students fill out registration forms each term with their advisors. During the end of the sophomore year when students are choosing majors, departmental advisors are assigned. Specialized academic advising exists in two preprofessional areas: law and medical fields. Advisors initially sign a 2-year contract that is renewable yearly contingent upon satisfactory performance and continued status as a full-time graduate student. Each advisor is responsible for about 120 students and works an average of 17 hours a week. Qualities sought in graduate-student advisors include communication skills, interest in undergraduate liberal arts education, understanding of the advisor's role, and reliability. In addition, a broad range of academic backgrounds, experiences, and interests are sought for the total staff. After being hired, new advisors undertake training for 6-8 weeks for 20 hours per week. No attempt is made to match freshmen-sophomore students with advisors on the basis of academic interests. (SW)

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ACADEMIC ADVISING
IN
THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

A Descriptive Report

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OVERVIEW

Undergraduate academic advising in the College of Arts and Scienc (CAS, at the University of Pittsburgh occurs at two levels: freshmen-sophomore and junior-senior. All freshmen and sophomores are assigned a advisor in the CAS Advising Center, where the advisors are graduate stud from a wide variety of Pitt departments and schools who have been trainc extensively for the task of advising. Each term freshmen and sophomores discuss with their advisors course selections, possible majors and other academic options, as well as their career goals, educational plans, and academic-related problems. Advisors attempt to familiarize students wit academic programs, alternatives, and opportunities available to them at In addition to discussing courses and plans, students fill out their regi forms each term with their advisors and then take the forms to the Registr Office to be processed. An advisor's signature is required on all Univers registrations, but the College believes strongly that advisors are not ju persons to sign required forms; they have much valuable information, and students--especially freshmen and sophomores--are urged to take full adv of their advisors as often and as soon as the need arises. Advising Cen advisors are available 16 hours each week. If a student is disappointed an advisor, he/she may request to be reassigned to a new advisor by simp making an appointment to see one of the Advising Center directors.

Usually during the end of the sophomore year, CAS students either a major and are assigned an advisor in that department, design a major tl and find a faculty member willing to serve as sponsor and advisor, or app an undergraduate professional school within the University and, if accept are assigned an advisor in that school. Students who decide on a Liberal degree (no major) are encouraged to find a faculty advisor, but may remai the Advising Center. All departmental advisors are provided by the depar themselves and have the in-depth knowledge and information necessary to a students in their fields of concentration.

Specialized academic advising exists in two pre-professional area law and medical fields. The Advising Center has among its advisors, stud Pitt's Law School who have information about academic preparation for law admission requirements, and procedures, and other pre-law concerns. Pre- pre-dental, and other pre-health field advising is provided by the Univer Counseling Center through its Office of Health Professions Advising.

The following is a description of the organization and operation of the Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center.

BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE OF THE ADVISING CENTER

The present CAS advising system, including the Advising Center, was organized in 1959 to end the chaos of mass registration during the two days before classes begin and to provide students with a reliable source of information about options and requirements on a continuing basis. Initially junior faculty members served as academic advisors. The task, immensely time consuming and lacking prestige, however, was not popular with the and the advising staff was supplemented in 1960 with graduate students. Faculty soon phased themselves out completely and thereafter only graduate students were appointed. As Pitt became state-related and enrollments grew, the Center, now headed by a Director and two Associate Directors, expanded to include thirty-eight graduate student advisors, a three-person support staff, and three work-study students.

FACTS ABOUT THE ADVISOR'S JOB

Advisors initially sign a two-year contract which is renewable on a yearly basis contingent upon adequate performance and continued status as a full-time graduate student. Advisors are classified as Graduate Teaching Assistants, although their salary is slightly higher than that of Graduate Teaching Assistants; a full tuition scholarship and health insurance benefits are also provided. The current salary is $575.00 per month.

Each advisor is responsible for about 120 students. This number normally includes students assigned to the advisor as freshmen, students transfer from other schools within the University of Pittsburgh and from other colleges and universities, and students inherited from other advisors who leave the center. Also included might be students who requested to reassigned from another advisor.

Advisors work an average of 17 hours a week which must be spread over at least three days. Advisors are free to arrange their own hours and must turn appointment sheets into the receptionist at least two weeks in advance. Appointments are usually scheduled for one half-hour.

ADVISOR EVALUATION

The associate directors routinely meet with each advisor once a year to discuss the quality of the advisor's performance and to consider any suggestions the advisor may have regarding the operation of the Advising Center. Additional meetings are held with individual advisors if there are indications that they are not adequately meeting the requirements of their position.

Every so often students are asked to anonymously rate and evaluate the Advising Center in general and their advisor's performance in particular on a number of points. Completed questionnaires are reviewed by the directors and returned to the advisors and discussed individually with them.

Students are informed in various publications and by advisors themselves that if they are dissatisfied with their advisor, they may request a change. A director talks to each student about the problem and keeps a record of complaints. If a pattern of complaints emerges for a particular advisor, the problem is discussed with him/her and suggestions are made to remedy the situation.

THE ADVISORS

The real strength of the Advising Center lies in the outstanding graduate students chosen to be academic advisors. Because the Advising Center can usually hire only ten percent of the people who apply, careful selection is necessary and the positions are difficult to get. Applications are accepted in January from any full-time University of Pittsburgh graduate student. Each applicant is interviewed by a director and two advisors. Approximately one-third of the applicants are usually judged to be especially qualified and asked to return for a second interview with the three directors. From this group new advisors are chosen to replace those who leave the Advising Center each year. Among the qualities sought during these interviews are an excellent ability to communicate, a strong interest in and understanding of undergraduate liberal education, a realistic conception of an advisor's role and a sense of responsibility to the demands of the position and to students, as well as intelligence, reliability, and a high level of energy.

Since the University of Pittsburgh serves students with very different backgrounds, interests, and plans, it is important, too, that collectively the advisors be equally diverse. In addition to the personal qualities mentioned above a broad range of academic backgrounds, experiences, and interests

is sought for the total staff. Currently, the 38 advisors represent 28 different graduate or professional programs including English, History, Geography, Sociology, Fine Arts, Political Science, French and Italian, Anthropology, Math, History and Philosophy of Science, Linguistics, Counselor Education, Foundations of Education, Business, Medicine, Public Health, Dentistry, and Law. Fourteen advisors were Pitt undergraduates, the others came from 23 diverse colleges and universities. The strong international aspect of the University of Pittsburgh is equally apparent in the Advising Center. Five advisors are foreign students and collectively the Advising Center speaks 23 different languages including French, German, Polish, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Zulu, Hebrew, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Thai, Afrikaans, Zhosa, Hausa, Tigrinya, Cehyano as well as Sign Language. Students can also talk to advisors with such diverse areas of expertise and prior experience as Peace Corps training, family counseling, editing of professional journals, self defense, social work, fencing, archoeological field work, women's studies, the Air Force, professional writing, radio broadcasting, and urban planning.

TRAINING OF ADVISORS

After being hired, new advisors go through an intensive training program which lasts six to eight weeks at 20 hours per week. The training program is designed, organized, and facilitated by the three directors. During the first week, advisors are familiarized with the structure of the total University and particularly the College of Arts and Sciences, its curriculum, requirements, rules, and regulations. The remainder of the training program consists of presentations by guest speakers from throughout the University. A representative from each CAS department explains to the new advisors the courses and programs available in their department and their requirements for a major. Representatives from all University undergraduate and graduate professional schools to which CAS students may eventually apply present information about their school's programs and the prerequisites necessary to apply. In addition, specialists from important student service areas--the Counseling Center, Learning Skills Center, the library, housing, Writing Workshop, student aid, Registrar, and various tutoring services--speak about their activities so advisors are well informed and able to refer students to appropriate places for help with any number of problems.

New advisors in training also meet several hours each week in small groups with "veteran" advisors who review and explain Advising Center procedures and policies and share their own experiences and perceptions as advisors. In addition, at least one session is held with a group of students who have just completed their freshmen year. The students are invited to relate, analyze and critize their experiences with their own advisors, emphasizing what they expect or hope for from an advisor, and outlining what they found most helpful and what they found lacking in their advising experiences.

Advisor training continues throughout the year for all advisors in the form of a constant barrage of information sheets, course descriptions, explanations, and reminders, and in the form of weekly "coffee hours" and informative meetings where speakers present news about departments which have instituted changes or about areas which advisors expressed a need to have more information.

FRESHMEN ADVISING

The advisor training program is planned to end several days before Freshmen Orientation in June. Each new advisor is then assigned roughly 100 new freshmen. Since all advisors initially sign a two-year contract, ideally a student will have the same advisor for his/her first two years before declaring a major and moving into the departmental junior-senior advising system. Because each advisor is trained to know every department and program, and because so many new students are undecided about their educational goals and often change their plans several times, and because the Advising Center strongly believes that exploration and exposure to choices and alternatives should be the hallmark of the first few years of college, no attempt is made at the freshmen-sophomore level to match students with advisors on the basis of academic interests, although committed students may request an advisor from a particular field. It seems much more important that students experience the concerned personal relationships and the continuity of advising inherent in seeing the same advisor during the first years.

Advisors initially meet their students in large group sessions during Freshmen Orientation where they present general information about academic requirements, the advising and registration process, and College rules, regulations and procedures. At these sessions advisors also schedule a one hour registration appointment with each student at which individual plans and

goals are discussed and the first term's courses selected. Because of this individual attention, only students from outside the metropolitan Pittsburgh area are registered during the four-day orientation period, local students register during the remainder of the summer.

Early in each Fall and Winter Term, advisors hold group information sessions for their students at which individual appointments are made to register for the next term. Many advisors also require students to make pre-registration or "advising" appointments prior to the registration period. The pre-registration appointments were instituted when advisors found that there was usually not enough time during the registration period to allow for sufficient discussion of students' experiences with courses, adjustments to college life, career plans and interests, etc. Since actual registration now occurs after consideration of these matters, course selection becomes part of a more meaningful ongoing dialogue, and advisors are not viewed as mere "form signers".

Since the advisor is a key link between the individual student and a large, overwhelming, bureaucratic, urban university, it is important that advisors be empathetic, informed, and accessible individuals. Students are urged to see their advisor not only for pre-registration and registration appointments, but also throughout the term as academic problems arise or as information is needed.